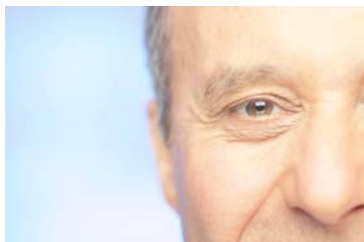


Some facts about schizophrenia



About 2.2 million adults, or 1.1 percent of Americans 18 and older in a given year, have schizophrenia.

Schizophrenia ranks among the top 10 causes of disability in developed countries worldwide.

The risk of suicide is serious in people with schizophrenia.

Most people with schizophrenia are not violent toward others but are withdrawn and prefer to be left alone.



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Mental Health
25 Staniford Street
Boston, MA 02114

Phone: 617-626-8000
Fax: 617-626-8131
TTY: 617-727-9842
www.mass.gov/dmh

Massachusetts
Department of
Mental Health

When someone has
SCHIZOPHRENIA



617-626-8000
www.mass.gov/dmh

When someone has schizophrenia



Schizophrenia is a devastating brain disorder — the most chronic and disabling of the severe mental illnesses. The first signs of schizophrenia,

which typically emerge when a person is in his or her teens or twenties, are confusing and often shocking to families and friends. Hallucinations, delusions, disordered thinking, unusual speech or behavior and social withdrawal impair the person's ability to interact with others.

Most people with schizophrenia experience symptoms chronically or episodically throughout their lives. They often are stigmatized by a lack of public understanding about the disease. However, several new antipsychotic medications developed within the last decade, which have fewer side effects than older medications, in combination with psychosocial interventions, have improved the outlook for many people with schizophrenia.

Treatments for schizophrenia

Newer medications for schizophrenia — called *atypical* antipsychotics — are very effective in treating psychosis, including symptoms such as hallucinations and delusions, and may also help treat the symptoms of reduced motivation or blunted emotional expression.

Intensive case management, cognitive-behavioral approaches that teach coping and problem-solving skills, family educational interventions and vocational rehabilitation provide additional benefit.

Evidence suggests that early and sustained treatment that includes antipsychotic medication may improve the long-term course of schizophrenia. Over time, many people with schizophrenia learn successful ways of managing even severe symptoms.

Because schizophrenia sometimes impairs thinking and problem solving, some people may not recognize they are ill and may refuse treatment, sometimes because of forgetfulness or disorganized thinking. Others may stop treatment because of medication side effects or because they feel their medication is no longer working. People with schizophrenia who stop taking prescribed medication are at high risk for a relapse of the illness. A good doctor-patient relationship may help people with schizophrenia continue to take medications as prescribed.



Research

Although they provide clues about the causes of schizophrenia and the brain regions involved in this illness, research findings are not sufficient to use in diagnostic tests. Scientists continue to investigate possible prenatal factors, including infections, which may affect brain development and contribute to the development of schizophrenia.

Current Findings

Family studies show that genetics plays a role in the risk factors for schizophrenia. A person whose parent or sibling has schizophrenia has about a ten percent risk of developing the disorder compared to a one percent risk for a person with no family history of schizophrenia.

Research also suggests that schizophrenia may be a developmental disorder resulting from impaired migration of neurons in the brain during fetal development. Advances in neuroimaging have shown that some people with schizophrenia have brain structure abnormalities.

Schizophrenia can appear in children, though this is very rare. Neuroimaging research of child-onset schizophrenia has shown evidence of abnormal brain development.